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International Dateline — UNESCO and the Modern Library

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The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) is an active organization of the United Nations (UN). Although its origin was with the **League of Nations** and the **Conference of Allied Ministers of Education**, UNESCO was formally incorporated with the UN in 1946. Since then, UNESCO has become an important multifaceted resource for libraries and information technology on the world front. Moreover, with an international publications list, depository program, and other library-related endeavors, UNESCO has always served as an international champion for libraries.

The **League of Nations**, established in 1920, was the first multinational organization of the countries of the world. The goal of the League was to foster peace and encourage cooperation on the international level. To meet the needs of intellectual and educational cooperation, in 1922 the **International Committee on Intellectual Cooperation** was formed. Two years later, Paris offered to create and fund an international institute for the pursuit of intellectual cooperation. The League of Nations agreed, and in 1926 the International Committee on Intellectual Cooperation became the governing body of the newly-created **International Institute of Intellectual Cooperation**, based in Paris.

After World War II, the mission of the League of Nations was continued by the United Nations which revived some of the previous programs of the League of Nations on a larger and more formidable scale. The International Committee on Intellectual Cooperation had ceased operation with the dissolution of the League. During the war, the agenda of this organization had been partially continued by the **Conference of Allied Ministers of Education (CAME)**. Once the war ended, CAME was reestablished to include educational, cultural and scientific units within the newly formed UN.

In November of 1946, The United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organization began official operations. The UNESCO constitution opened with a quote from **Clement Attlee**, Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, and **Archibald MacLeish**, United States of America poet and Librarian of Congress: "... that since wars begin in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defenses of peace must be constructed."¹ UNESCO was established to promote peace and security through the application of education, science and culture to international understanding and human welfare. The main concern of the founders was to promote and organize international cooperation through the dissemination of knowledge, the comparison of experi-

ence, and the discussion of ideas, in collaboration with both national and international non-governmental federations in which many specialists are represented.²

Paris was designated as the location of UNESCO's headquarters, in honor of this city's long-standing cultural heritage. The site was the former Hotel Majestic near the Arc de Triomphe. Before UNESCO was both formally and officially established, the main arbiter for the predecessor of UNESCO was Executive Secretary **Sir Alfred Zimmern** of the UK. However, Sir Alfred's tenure was short-lived due to illness. In March 1946, **Dr. Julian Huxley** of the UK, was nominated directly to the post. After UNESCO became an official organ of the UN, Dr. Huxley became the first Director-General of UNESCO. Dr. Huxley was a complex and controversial man. In his publication, *UNESCO: Its Purpose and Its Philosophy*, he described UNESCO as "necessary ... in spite of all multiplicity of detail."³ After his book was published, however, UNESCO firmly stated that the book was in no way an expression of its ideals.⁴

After its tumultuous start, UNESCO began to assert itself in the world. The first general conference of UNESCO was held at the Sorbonne University in November 1946. The following year saw the first book published by UNESCO, *Fundamental Education: Common Ground for All People*.⁵ Many more books, journals and reports were soon to follow. By the early 1950s, UNESCO was faced with post-war reconstruction issues, including extensive educational reconstruction.⁶ The 1950s also saw UNESCO tackle the problem of communicating in a multilingual world especially with the growing technologies of radio, television, and film. This time period saw the growth of some of UNESCO's most successful publications, including the *UNESCO Courier*. The decade ended with the inauguration of a new headquarters in Paris, decorated with art by such masters as **Picasso**, **Moore**, **Calder**, and **Miro**.

By the mid-1960s, the number of UNESCO member states had risen to 114. The original UNESCO goals remained constant; however, by the 1960s UNESCO endeavored to protect and restore historic monuments of the world, including the monuments of Nubia in Egypt and the Ponte Vecchio in Italy. In the following decade UNESCO undertook the safeguarding of the Acropolis in Athens, pursued an emphasis on sports in education, and continued to support the ongoing plight of women worldwide.

The 1980s saw the additional safeguarding of a number of historical and cultural sites, including the monuments at Hue in Vietnam, the Angkor in Cambodia, and the ancient city

of Ouadane in Mauritania.

During this period, UNESCO also funded traveling cultural exhibits and addressed environmentalism. The United States, however, was not pleased with all of UNESCO's activities. In 1984, the US withdrew its UNESCO membership. Apparently, the issues were essentially ideological; the US administration, at the time, wished to withdraw from most UN agencies.⁷ A year later, the United Kingdom did the same.

At the beginning of the present decade, there were 163 UNESCO member countries. Issues for the 1990s included publication of volumes of the *History of the Scientific and Cultural Development of Mankind*, freedom of information issues, continued environmental issues, AIDS education, Internet resource issues, and preparations for the year 2000. UNESCO has also, in response to the new needs and new ethical and historical demands, formulated the concept of a culture of peace.⁸

As of 1998, UNESCO now has 186 member nation states (including the UK, which rejoined in 1997). While the main objective of UNESCO is the same, the methods to reach the objective has been explicitly stated. The five principle functions of UNESCO are:

1. Prospective Studies: what forms of education, science, culture and communication for tomorrow's world.
2. The advancement, transfer and sharing of knowledge relying primarily on research, training and teaching activities.
3. Standard setting action: the preparation and adoption of international instruments and statutory recommendations.
4. Expertise: provided to Member States for their development policies and projects in the form of "technical cooperation."
5. Exchange of specialized information.⁹

UNESCO continues to safeguard the world's cultural heritage, support education and promote cooperation worldwide. Within the last year, UNESCO has been active in the World Solar Summit, in the UN International Year of the Ocean Program and has been involved in the Africa and Globalization Conference in Mozambique.

Historically, UNESCO has always been one of the main supporters of libraries on the international level. One of the main founding blocks for UNESCO is the necessity and importance of libraries:

"There are a number of institutions and organizations which are devoted to the twin functions of preserving the world's scientific and cultural heritage and for making it available when preserved... museums and libraries. Since such institutions are

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brought into existence to perform a particular kind of function in relation to culture and science, it follows that in relation to them an organization like UNESCO will largely be concerned with techniques and their improvements."¹⁰

As early as 1948, broad coverage was given to libraries, books, and publications. UNESCO reached an agreement to hold summer schools for librarians, to improve and translate manuals of library techniques, and to complete and publish a multilingual dictionary of librarianship.¹¹

As the libraries and their information systems grew more complex, UNESCO followed by organizing and reorganizing its information programs. The first big move to promote UNESCO's information programs occurred in 1966 with the creation of **The Department of Documentation, Libraries and Archives (DBA)**. Less than ten years later, DBA incorporated UNESCO's **Information System in Science and Technology (UNISIST)**. The DBA was then soon restructured to form the **General Information Program (PGI)**. The PGI's goal was to have one main program run all of the hitherto separate UNESCO information programs. In a final realignment in the early 1990's, DBA was merged into the **Bureau of Documentation, Informatics and Telecommunication (DIT)**, alongside the PGI. The DIT services all sectors with library, archive, and documentation support so that information resources are integrated for effective and efficient dissemination.¹²

Within the last few years, the support that UNESCO has given libraries has either been recuperative or instructional. UNESCO has provided funding for many libraries to build new buildings or to preserve old ones. For example, UNESCO has worked with the Egyptian government on a project to revive the **Library at Alexandria**, as established by Ptolemy I. Moreover, UNESCO began working with Bosnia on the rebuilding of the destroyed **Sarajevo National Library** and the **University of Sarajevo**. On the instructional front, UNESCO has available a **Public Library Manifesto** to help guide public libraries worldwide.

UNESCO is involved with numerous projects at any one time. Two of the largest programs that have the most effect on libraries are the UNESCO publications program and the UNESCO Depository Library program. Both programs serve to expand services and to meet the needs of the world.

UNESCO has been publishing books for over fifty years. Presently, over 10,000 titles have been published worldwide since 1947. One-hundred and sixty new titles are published a year, translated into 80 languages, and distributed by 190 national distributors in 122 countries.¹³ The UNESCO publications make the organization and their products available to the world. Subjects range from children's

books to world news reports. UNESCO also publishes a large number of periodicals on varying international subjects. The most widely circulated UNESCO periodical is the *UNESCO Courier*. This monthly journal, which is published in thirty languages, reports on world issues of universal concern.¹⁴ Currently, UNESCO publishes in CD-ROM and Internet formats as well. Through these myriad types of publications, UNESCO reaches all corners of the world.

A second important program utilized by libraries is the UNESCO depository program. UNESCO currently has 166 depository libraries in 160 countries. The international network of depository libraries was created in 1946 in order to provide easier access in every country to UNESCO resources. A central library or documentation center was chosen in each country to carry out UNESCO's directives.¹⁵ The main central UNESCO library is located in Paris at UNESCO's headquarters. The library contains about 150,000 volumes of UNESCO publications, 1,300 current periodical titles, 80,000 microfiche, and access to CD-ROM and Internet technologies. There are two UNESCO depositories in the United States: **The Dag Hammarskjold Library**, in the United Nations Building, NY, and the **Library of Congress** in Washington, DC. Many other libraries throughout the United States also purchase UNESCO publications and regularly add them to their collections. Through these numerous depositories, UNESCO publications can be studied, researched, and archived.


The other library activities in which UNESCO is currently involved are amazingly varied and numerous. Any attempt to encapsulate the entire UNESCO—library workings would be futile. Some examples of other current UNESCO-library involved activities are:

- MEDLIB, a Web-based library network for residents of the Mediterranean Sea area.
- The Global Directory of Aquatic and Marine Science Libraries and Information Centers, as published by the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission (IOC) of UNESCO.
- UNESCO backing on a funding drive to improve schools and libraries in the West Bank

and Gaza Strip.

- UNESCO endorsed guidelines for designing Web pages for libraries.
- A digital library initiative, supported by UNESCO, to preserve electronic information for future generations.
- The UNAL, an association of public libraries cooperating on community activities of UNESCO's main goals.¹⁶
- The General Information Programme's (PGI) resources to help Member States establish national information policies and safeguard and strengthen their national libraries.
- PGI's work with the International Federation of Library Associations (IFLA), the International Council on Archives (ICA) and the Federation of Information and Documentation (FID).
- UNESCO's address list of world libraries and network of associated libraries.
- UNESCO and ICA's guidelines for safeguarding vital records in the event of war.

With each successful year of UNESCO's achievements, there is more and more work being done with libraries and information technology on an international level. As the world continues to grow and expand into the age of global telecommunications, while at the same time contracting into one giant global village, UNESCO promises to be there. UNESCO will continue to supply libraries with support, guidance, ideas, financial backing, and knowledge that only an international organization with thorough historical experiences can provide.

Even though UNESCO may be based in Paris, and only have two main Depository Libraries in the United States, contacting UNESCO is as simple as logging on to the Internet, a phone call, or a letter. Important contact points are: The UNESCO Web address is: <http://www.unesco.org>. The UNESCO headquarters/library address is: UNESCO Library, 7 Place de Fontenoy, 75352 Paris 07 Sp FRANCE. Phone: 01133145681642. Fax: 01133331 45 685642. The UNESCO Depository Library at the United Nations: Dag Hammarskjold Library, The United Nations Plaza, New York, New York 10017. Phone: (212) 963-7412. Fax: (212) 963-0077. 

Endnotes

¹ Fernando Valderrama, *A History of UNESCO* (Paris: UNESCO Publishing, 1995), p. 395

² Valderrama, pg. 25

³ Julian Huxley, *UNESCO: Its Purpose and its Philosophy* (Washington, D.C.: Public Affairs Press, 1948), pg. 72.

⁴ Valderrama, pg. 26

⁵ Seth Spaulding and Lin Lin, *Historical Dictionary of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organizations* (UNESCO) (Janham, Md.: Scarecrow Press, 1997), pg. xxviii.

⁶ UNESCO, *UNESCO COURIER*, Supplement, vol. 1, no. 11-12, December 1948-January 1949 (Paris: UNESCO, 1949), pg. 2.

⁷ Spaulding and Lin, pg. x.

⁸ Federico Mayor, *UNESCO -- An Ideal in Action: The Continuing Relevance of a Visionary*

Text (Paris: UNESCO Publishing, 1997), pg. 122.

⁹ UNESCO, *About UNESCO: What is UNESCO*. <http://www.unesco.org/general/eng/about/what.html> (3 April 1998).

¹⁰ Huxley, pg. 65

¹¹ Valderrama, pg. 41.

¹² Spaulding, pg. 90.

¹³ UNESCO, *Publishing: UNESCO Publishing in Figures*. <http://www.unesco.org/general/eng/publish/frankfa.html>. (27 July 1998).

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ UNESCO, *Publishing: Depository Libraries*. <http://www.unesco.org/general/eng/publish/info.html>. (27 July 1998).

¹⁶ UNESCO, *UNESCO Network of Associated Libraries*. <http://www.unesco.org/webworld/unal/index.html>. (22 July 1998).